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**Note: Sound bites on this topic will be available shortly: [www.dhhs.ne.gov/audio](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/audio)**

## **DHHS Visits to State Wards Better Than Federal Requirement**

**Lincoln** – Case managers exceeded the federal requirement in 2013 for monthly meetings with state wards, and at their current rate, they already match a higher 2015 requirement, according to Thomas Pristow, director of Children and Family Services in the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

The required federal visitation rate for 2013 was 90 percent for children placed out of their home, he said. At the end of last year, 95 percent of out-of-home children were visited monthly by case managers, which is the requirement set for all states in 2015.

"I am very proud of the hard work of our case managers," Pristow said. "This significant increase in regularly serving the needs of state wards demonstrates the professionalism of staff and their commitment to the children in their charge."

He said monthly visits to children placed out of their home improved significantly after climbing to 85 percent in 2012 and 95 percent by the end of 2013.

Studies have shown that the frequency and quality of monthly visits with state wards positively impacts a child's safety, permanency and well-being, he said. And, case managers are able to identify and provide community services to help wards.

In addition, visits are high with children not involved in the court system, Pristow said. Although there is no federal standard, case managers' monthly visits with children living in their family home also rose to 95 percent in 2013.

"Along with a more than 20 percent reduction in state wards since March 2012, these indicators show that we are doing a better job of helping children have a better life by providing the right care at the right time," said Kerry Winterer, DHHS CEO. "We will continue working to improve our effectiveness in all areas of our work."

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